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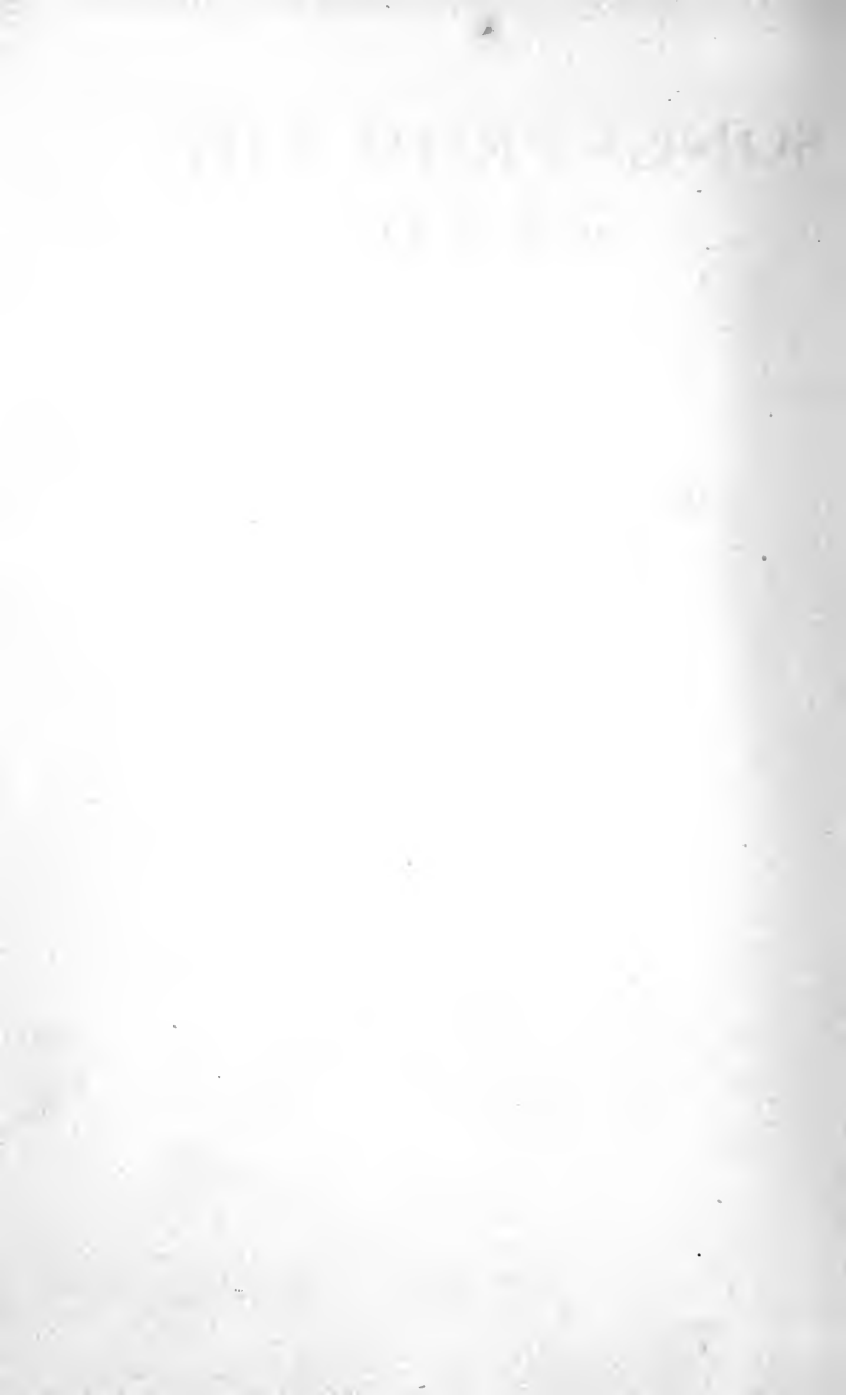


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SONGS FROM THE SOUTH



SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

BY

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TO GWEN

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With the Author's Compliments.



I AM deeply indebted to Miss Nancy Thomas of Min-yr-Afon, Ruabon, for frank criticism while these "Songs" were in the making; her sane judgment has been invaluable. I am under a like obligation to Professor John Purves of Transvaal University College, Pretoria.

J. E. A.

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Songs from the South

THE MARCH OF THE DAYS.

OH ! stop the hurrying days,
They fly so quickly past,
We cannot catch their beauty or appraise
Their wonder while they last.

Nay ! speed them in their flight,
Time is no prudent churl ;
For ever on the thread of dark and light
He quietly slips a pearl.

ELUSIVE AFRICA.

WHERE is the soul of Africa ?
Where song is silent
But silence sings ;
Where dark is pregnant
With glimmerings
Ungotten of moon or sun or star.

Where is the pulse of Africa ?
Where shadows are lit
To a glowing brown ;
Where the infinite
Rings in the town ;
Where stars are near and neighbours far.

What is the secret of Africa,
Where youth is old
And age is young ;
Where hope is bold
And care is flung
Through the portals of the past ajar ?

Where is the home of Africa ?
Where rooms are alleys
On to the stoep ;
Where the rider sallies
From streets that coop ;
Where the waggon keeps in front of the car.

Where is the sigh of Africa ?
Where no breeze foils
The fever-heat ;
Where the worker toils
In the walled-in street ;
Where tongues are many that harmony mar.

What is the riddle of Africa,
Where now is never
Tho' yesterday's gone ;
And to be ever
But never won ;
Where the ship never crosses the harbour bar ?

Where is the heart of Africa ?
Where the void is full
Of the shining sun ;

Where veld-airs lull
The heat of noon ;
Where the kaffir croons over the rude guitar.

Where is the vision of Africa ?
In the soul of the rover
Wandering wide,
When the scent of the clover
Is thrust aside
By the throb of the veld in memory's scar.

THE INEFFICIENT CLERK.

THE terminus ! Not of the tram alone,
But also of that eight-hour interlude
When ledger, bell, and 'phone
Have all conspired to prove ineptitude ;
Now he is on the threshold of the night,
The night ? for him the coming of the light !

The humming of the car far down the line
Has ceased before he makes a move for home ;
The evening is too fine
For hurrying, a cloudscape fills the dome ;
And so he waits to let a motor pass,
Then takes the narrow track across the grass.

The garden gate has clicked and at the sound
The dogs rush out to share his world with him ;
Loud bark and joyous bound
Proclaim at last the dead day's requiem ;
To a warm nook that eve's red fires light up
Smiling Johannes brings the fragrant cup.

6 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

And now with quick appreciative eye
He greets the panorama in the west ;
The mystery of the sky
Is speedily to him made manifest ;
With rainbow key he soon uncodes the scene,
Save for a wondrous and uncharted green.

Once up and down the garden path he goes,
But this is not the home of his romance ;
Even a fresh young rose
Appeals in vain. The red dies from the kranz,
And gladly he obeys the guttural call
To the frugal meal. The evening shadows fall.

He starts to read the virile " Songs of Travel "
Sung by the alien singer of the south ;
The melodies unravel
Around his nervous sympathetic mouth ;
And forest green and lazy blue lagoon
Displace the silver shimmer of the moon.

But soon the book is shut that he may hear
The music of his own unwritten song ;
Articulate and clear
It rings the grooves of silence all along ;

For the soul of the inefficient clerk
Is a terminal for whispers from the dark.

They come from the spreading sunlit veld,
From kopje, kloof, and donga, from the sea,
From the fever-haunted belt,
From where he's been and where he fain would be ;
For he knows every song that they can sing,
Every note of the music that they bring.

His chair upon the stoep is now a seat
Reserved within the theatre of the night ;
His soul goes out to greet
The amazing splendour of his fancy's flight ;
The fibre of his being throbs and swings
Attuned to the dark's orchestral strings.

Six hours of dreams and dawning comes in grey
Loth to outdo the evening's brilliancy ;
Tramward he makes his way
With something yet of her resiliency ;
But Jawkins' loud " Good morning ! " breaks the
spell—
The opening scene of day's protracted hell.

AFTER HEAVY RAINS.

GONE is the brooding reservoir of cloud
That for a decade of grey days has filled
The vault ; in sheets or torrents, as it willed,
Bursting its convex bounds, and hissing loud
Its victory o'er the parched earth's fires. A crowd
Of snowy fleeces throng the blue and build
Moving mosaics on heaven's floor, distilled
From sun and sea, to beauty's service vowed.
The long-dry dongas their deliverance roar ;
A green sea holds the plain and climbing fills
The creeks and harbours of the distant hills :
To their high tops the emerald eddies pour ;
The wonder is they have not overflowed
The red-brown ribbon of the narrow road.

MIDDAY.

THE dorp is dozing ;
The spread of the nooning sun,
His lassitude imposing,
Has steadied, stayed, and stopped the workers one
by one.

The street is basking ;
The stores no longer hum ;
The coolie wearies asking
The kaffir's trade ; and squats wide-eyed but still
and dumb.

The team is lying
Along and athwart the chain ;
The voorloper is sighing
Upon his couch between the wheels for dark again.

The clerk is drowsing
And nodding on the stool ;
Dull memory arousing
A fleeting figment of a plunge into the pool.

10 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

The garden's panting ;
The cat has ceased to prowl ;
A crazy iron slanting
Lends mocking cover to a gasping blinking fowl.

The leaves are drooping
Pendant and powerless ;
The slender stems are stooping
Beneath the load of lurid shafts that downward press.

The hills are staring,
The shimmering brown flanks glow ;
The kopje's height is glaring ;
The veld, swooning in heat, lies motionless below.

The earth is waiting :
The blue holds brown in thrall ;
His grip no jot abating,
Remorselessly he seals dominion over all.

The dorp is sleeping ;
Life from the stoep is sped ;
Save where the lizard's steeping
His cold green scales on glowing stones warm blood
 has fled.

THE SUMMER STORM.

THE shots of his vanguard rattle
Against the iron roofs ;
The grey-black line of his battle
Blots out the hills and kloofs ;
His front lit by forked flashes,
His herald the thunder's peal,
On veld and dorp he crashes
And sets his blinding seal.

With rage his features harden,
His sluices downward pour ;
On veld and roof and garden
He falls with a hiss and a roar ;
With cloud-sent shafts he lashes
The panting prostrate earth ;
And laughs at the long ribbed gashes
In wild and savage mirth.

His first mad passion sated,
He thinks it time to relent ;

12 . SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

His shock is now abated,
His blows are sooner spent ;
He sees how she shrinks and cowers,
He sees the marks of his spleen ;
And loosens gentle showers
To wash the red wounds clean.

The roar of his first fierce onset
Is now a haunting croon ;
Wild as a winter sunset,
Sad as a waning moon ;
The faint earth turns to listen
As one turns to a bird at dawn ;
Her eyes begin to glisten
Like dew on a sheltered lawn.

The fever has departed,
Her limbs are fresh and cool ;
Happy and lighthearted
She bathes in the storm-born pool ;
And laughs to think that his thunder
And rage and wantonness
Were the husk of a lover's blunder,
The kernel was a caress.

MARCH AND COUNTERMARCH.

WITH sudden onset the wide pall of night
Stifles the lingering embers of the day ;
With counterstroke as swift the lord of light
Annihilates the dark with far-flung ray.

The fierce wind fills the storm-cloud's lurid sail,
Darkening with surly gloom the radiant sky ;
An avalanche of blinding rain and hail
And lo ! the smiling veld is warm and dry.

Three hours ago the lazy languorous airs
Were furnace-hot with white shafts from the sun ;
And now with cutting breath the wind unbare
The fallacy that summer has begun.

When last I looked the dry and parchéd hills
Towered glaring o'er the veld, burnt, brown, and
bare ;
And now they sleep lulled by the swollen rills,
While all the lowlands a green carpet share.

14 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

And thus we swing through march and counter-
march

From burn of tropic sun to bite of cold,
From violet bed of eve to morn's high arch,
From green and young to brown and bare and old.

Now summer leaps to winter with a bound,
Splashing slow startled autumn in her stride ;
Now winter hot-a-foot must end the round,
Raising a cloud of dust spring to deride.

It may be that these undulations swift
Of heat and cold, of shadow and of glare,
Are tributary to the urgent drift
That harries men from recklessness to care,

From swift resolve to faltering and flight,
From hills of hope to valleys of despair,
From fear at dark to courage with the light,
From hate's fell fog to faith's clean upland air.

The surging cosmic moods grimly enfold
The moral of a march that leads right on ;
For it is sovereign wisdom to lay hold
Of what is left, nor mourn o'er what is gone.

The forward look, quick burial of regret,
Out of the débris to new vantage-ground !
And surely as in red the sun has set
In white he'll open up to-morrow's round.

YOUTH.

You'd think he held the keys of the morning,
 You'd say he'd leased the lilt of the day :
 He walked as on the wing
 And a song I heard him sing
 As the sunlight opened up for him the way.

He'd lost no trace of vigour at high noonday,
 He took the street with easy swinging stride ;
 Blue and keen and bright
 His eye challenged the light
 As he slipped through the swaying human tide.

The setting sun outlined him wet and gleaming,
 Poised on the cool pool's bank ;
 The gurgle of the plunge,
 Clean as a rapier's lunge,
 Told the welcome of the waters as he sank.

The music of the dance had chased the midnight
 And was heralding the dawn of a new day :

Untiringly he sped
And in the vanguard led
A maiden through the rhythm of the lay.

And if his eye should dim or step should falter,
As the years heap up their tale of day and night,
He can dwell with a glow
On that good long ago,
When he easily outdid them in their flight.

BEYOND THE BARRIERS.

WHEN the freed skiff from moorings gaily bounds,
Responsive to the rudder and reefed sails,
And clearing the piled pier, joyously hails
The pulsing swelling morning ; when red mounds
And waving untracked grasses call the hounds
And barehead rider, when nor wire nor rails
Block the long leagues, when nothing now avails
To break the stride, when matin-song resounds ;
Oh ! then awakes the wild tumultuous hour
When barriers are forgotten, the wide world
Is man's inviolate heritage, the soul
Sounds the strong keynote of unfettered power,
Rides where the flag of freedom is unfurled,
Scorns plotted parts and claims the uncharted whole.

THE COMING OF WINTER.

THE curtain's raised, the sweeping monsoon rain
Has left us for a year ;
The heavens are high, the arch is blue again,
The air is cool and clear :
We're launched upon the voyage to the brown and
sere.

Here on this lofted sunny hinterland
The soul begins to sing,
The stature grows and eye and heart expand
When summer's on the wing ;
For we awake in autumn as you awake in spring.

'Twas yesterday we cowered 'neath the sun
We laboured 'neath the cloud ;
And when the impending roofed-in day had gone,
Mosquitoes sang aloud
Their endless tireless drone to sleep's destruction
vowed.

20 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

Now is the morning purified and purged
Of languor, drone, and lees ;
The sleeper from the barred room has emerged
Into the sparkling seas,
And buoyantly he heads away toward the breeze.

Now is the course a gallery of days,
Horizon-wide, heaven-high,
Shot end to end with cool strong sparkling rays,
Roofed by a cloudless sky
Blue as a summer sea, steadfast as destiny.

While through the spring you slowly broaden down
To hedge-rows green of June,
We steal through autumn to the gold and brown,
To welcome heat of noon,
To starlit nights when veld-fires spread beneath the
 moon.

Your sun will now climb zenithwards, and ours
Reluctantly descend ;
You'll sing the fragrance after summer showers,
While boldly we'll contend
For morn's resilient splendour, for the stars that
 blend.

For days that sparkle and for nights that thrill,
For breakfast in the sun,
For the gaunt vigour of the clean-cut hill,
For the still afternoon,
For long red fires of sundown when the day is done.

Luxuriance yours : harvest of hay and corn,
The song of lark and thrush,
The lingering twilight and the blossoming thorn,
The rosy spreading blush
On the deep-breathing sea asleep in the dawning
hush.

Rare splendour ours : harvest of shining days,
Silence along the height,
Long violet shadows on the crumbling vleis,
Star-studded vault of night,
The cold grey wind that wakes the veld to greet the
light.

THE QUIVERING GUM.

I FEEL no airs,
But the slender gum of single stem
Is tremulous to the tips ;
I think it shares
Quivers of dead day's requiem,
The last breath from her lips.

Each upturned hand
Fingers the void for throbbing strings,
For pulsings of the eve ;
They understand
The silent song that the sunset sings,
Eve's toneless semibreve.

A troop in flight
Of homing birds seeks sanctuary ;
The fragile swaying hands
Pity their plight :
The crest is a cradling aviary
Of fluttering tired bands.

Now they are sped
Down a short trail of tuneless notes ;
The fingers derelict
Take up the thread
Of sunset's swaying song that floats
Soundless but benedict.

A SUMMER NIGHT.

TWELVE hours the sun has poured upon the earth,
His burning dazzling light ;
Now he has left us, till the morrow's birth,
The sultry languorous night.

The skyline's haunted by a sullen glare
That devastates the dark ;
All through the sombre cloud-ridge looming there
The restless lightnings spark.

Here nothing stirs the stillness of the air,
The long-stemmed flowers droop,
Save that winged whirring warriors vainly dare
To invade the lighted stoep.

The cricket's rasp is slowly dying down
To a more tuneful bent,
And the low distant murmur of the town
Hums an accompaniment.

From the near gloom a sudden short sharp bark
Out there the night-mail's roar,
Strive to assail the rising tide of dark ;
In vain the echoes soar :

The burden of the heavy pendant night
Pinions the breathless earth ;
And it would seem there can be no more light,
No dawn, no new day's birth ;

When from within and the lit stoep along
There breaks a firm strong chord,
And a clear rushing stream of living song
Announces a safe ford

Across the dark, a soulborn instrument
With which enfranchised man
Can recreate the encircling firmament,
And hold in check the van

Of night, of dark, of inner gloom and rage,
Of binding circumstance :
Victory blazoned on the illumined page
Of ever-young Romance !

SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS.

THE sense of fellowship, the love of man,
Is not the foster-child of fatherhood
Or any some-part selfish bond of blood.
Born of the life that from the red wounds ran
Of locked battalions, it speeds the van
Of common institutions, common joys,
And common duties ; singing through the noise
Of train and car, propping a nation's span.
Strong linkéd purpose, dovetailed destiny,
This is the tide and this the crested wave
That stirs the bosom of the far-spread sea,
The ocean of our common heritage
Where, though the storms of self may fret and rage,
Souls, far adrift, shall yet find arms to save.

SANCTUARY.

THERE is a sanctuary, where week by week,
Simple trusting souls foregather ;
Some, as they say, to worship, some to seek
Solace for lost endeavour.

To sit a while apart from circumstance,
Aloof from tidal ebbs and flows ;
To leave the tossing of the sea of chance
For the firm shore's repose.

To sit and see the bright sun boldly cross
The guarded threshold, just so far,
And suddenly stop bewildered, at a loss
Before the barrier

Of shadow, brighter than his own broad band
Of radiant cloud-directed rays ;
The light that never was on sea or land
And yet fills all the days.

28 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

To listen while the organ now reveals
The swelling chords of morning's hymn ;
To hear how through the responsive nave there
 steals
The lingering amen.

To hear the promise of a burden shared,
Of pity full and manifold,
Of shelter for the soul that now was bared,
Prone, shuddering, and cold.

To hear the words that through a thousand years
The wondrous tale have bravely carried
Of resurrected hopes, of dried-up tears,
Of death-blows boldly parried.

Sure sanctuary ! the vibrant red-brown walls
Rise nobly, stronger than the strong,
Raising against the storm that on them falls
A battlement of song !

And when the peal has passed, when all is still
Without, and song dies down within,
The birds in sheltering eaves the silence fill,
And flute and pipe begin.

RED AFRICA.

THE virgin veld

By the clean ploughshare to the sun upturned :
You've seen the ruddy bronze that through it burned,
You've felt the throbbing life that in it dwelt.

The red of earth :

You've seen it from the windows of the mail,
When after heavy rains white fleeces sail
Aloft, and there's an end of drought and dearth.

The red of eve :

You've seen the line of winter's western fire
Glow sullen through the mist ; and then conspire
With dark'ning violet, peace to retrieve.

The red of night :

You've seen the veld-fire spreading on the hills,
Stealing on lambent flame-feet where it wills,
Ruddy at dark, by day a bare black blight.

30 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

Pillar of dust :

The herald of the quickly-gathering storm
Is Afric's scourge ; you've seen the red ensign form,
Advance, and fall, in the van of the lightning-thrust.

The flaunting red

That reigns upon the leafless kaffir-boom :
The red of aloes where the kopjes loom :
You've seen them, and the miracle is not dead.

The red camp-fire

When pipes and stars are lit, when throbbing night
Is near, and crunching mules but speed the flight
Of memory : you've felt the soul aspire.

The rocks' warm red

That glistens through the green of weed and wave :
You've seen it when the slow tides lift and lave
Them lazily, and the sun's high light is spread.

The red of race :

You've seen it flood the trembling features pale ;
That is a red relentlessly to assail
Till nation's blend the crudeness shall efface.

Well, blood is red,
And the young veins of Africa now throb
With full vitality ; nothing shall rob
Her of the prize : a nation strongly bred.

STREET-BLOSSOMS.

WHY are street-blossoms rare ? in the long lane
Of passers-by why does the flower fair
In self-born radiance so seldom dare
To blow ? Do men prefer the dead domain
Of care and fear ? They rush to lock the chain,
To anticipate the thrall of an advent
Ruthless, and nurse each sadly-forged event
That shackles, and shuts out the sun and rain.
Nature unfolds a merrier, braver tale
Of search undaunted for the quickening dew ;
Lo ! even after devastating hail
The flowers assert life's final victory,
In resurrection fortified and free ;
Why cannot man daily his joy renew ?

THE WORKER.

PITY not the parrot
Wired in a cage,
The tailor in the garret
Stitching a daily wage ;
But rather pity him who's out of bounds
For whom nor lathe nor jenny ever sounds.

The candle in the cottage,
The fire in the grate,
The table with the potage,
The mealie on the plate :
No viand rare, no light that ever burned,
Can equal those if these have not been earned.

The car's not worth the craving
Though up the slope it steals ;
The tramfare's worth the saving,
You'll miss the jars and squeals ;
The peace that fills the foot-men when they land
Is what the wheel-men never understand.

34 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

The lilt that's in the ledger,
The song of buzzing drums,
The story of the voucher,
The throb of guiding thumbs :
The poetry of labour's not for them
That take a solid hour to choose a gem.

Pity him that lunches
Through a long menu ;
Envy Bill who crunches
A crust beneath the blue ;
There's ease of which the lounges never tell
Where waistbelts are unbuckled for a spell.

The scratching of the goose-quill,
The rasping of the file,
The clanging of the anvil,
The trowel on the pile :
There's music here that leisure never heard
In babbling brook or piping song of bird.

The storm is in the offing,
But let the shirkers run ;
The dust may quicken coughing,
We'll end what we've begun ;

The rain will wash the dust out, a wet shirt
Will leave us cool and fresh for the home spurt.

The lit pipe at the outspan,
The stretch of tired limbs,
The clean arms where the sweat ran,
The dam that labour brims :
Oh ! who would barter these that toil has won
For all the unearned increments 'neath the sun ?

The day's work now is over,
There's but the sky to scan ;
There's rest now for the rover,
The wife turns to her man ;
Her hand finds his, her eyes the week-old moon,
And through the dark she feels the love-song croon.

The cool night wind that passes,
The bright eyes of the stars,
The rustle in the grasses,
The sleep that knows no jars :
These are the worker's well-won recompense
Great ease of soul and limb, great joy of sense.

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36 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

Down to the town, the throbbing humming town,
Gaily we go, gaily although
Hours are long and labour's song is sometimes
 hard to sing,
It's a battle through the rattle, dust, and clamour-
 ing ;
None shall say we linger or loiter as we go
Down to the town, gaily stepping down.

Back home again, to home and stoep again,
Day's work is done, night's joy's begun ;
Up the slope, strong in hope, through the ruddy
 rays,
Who can measure our cup's pleasure or our joy
 appraise ?
There's the figure waiting in the setting sun :
" Wife and home again ! " beats the deep refrain.

THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY.

THIS earth of ours wheels onward through the void
Enclosed for ever in a filmy shell :
Canvas it is for colours of the morn
For blue of noon and all the pomp of eve ;
A sounding-board for song : for piping breeze,
For tempest's roar, for thunder's deaf'ning crash,
And all the great Musician's répertoire ;
A store-house for the dew, sweet perfume's vase,
A curtain 'gainst the light, a raiment soft
That holds the radiant heat ; a window wide
Wherethrough to get a glimpse of neighbour worlds—
No less a shell, light and invisible,
Yet holding us for ever fast entombed,
Choosing our panorama and our song.
And we must needs spin out another web,
Wind close about us an opaque cocoon
Of prejudice and pride, of memory,
Leanings, aversions, longings dim and vague
And stirrings deep of personality.

38 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

We fashion films to float before our eyes,
Wool for our ears, scales for unfeeling hands.
If we could sense the rose with virgin eyes,
Could strip the human accents from the word,
Silence the singer and yet hear the song,
Banish the ugly visage of strong rage,
Fathom a grief by blotting out the tears,
Face for a throb of time clean naked truth—
Perhaps we should not live to tell the tale.

THE ROAD TO TOWN.

FOR eyes and ears that know, the road,
Trode daily, has a vibrant code,
Speeding communion ; the miles
Renew their voices and their wiles
With each day's morning ; waiting grasses
Greet the wise wayfarer who passes :
Sometimes a nod, familiar, short,
Sometimes obeisance of the court.

The brook is on familiar terms,
Alert since dawning he affirms
A morning grave or gay ; nor fails
The signal that it naught avails
To cross his mood : if smooth and grey,
Contemplative you pick your way ;
But if he runs in joyous rills,
You stride along and morning thrills.

The careless wind will interview
The traveller and maybe woo

40 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

With whispers of the moor and strand ;
You bare your head and understand.
But if in league with languorous day,
He'll follow after all the way,
Winging the sun-shafts in their flight,
Mocking the while your sultry plight.

The very track has morning moods :
He shakes the soul that too much broods
With hidden pebbles ; and anon
Crunches in knowing unison.
Sometimes from timorous steps he slides
And floundering footfalls soft derides ;
Anon responsively he'll meet
The pulse of firm determined feet.

A willow waits outside the town,
And if you look as you go down
With eyes that pierce her reticence,
Her quiet smile will recompense
Your boldness ; for the fresh young green
In memory, the haunting sheen
Of her long locks, will carry you
Close-veiled the glaring streets right through.

TO THE DEAD.

The first casualties in General Botha's expeditionary force to what was formerly known as German South-West Africa were among the commandoes from the high veld in the east of Transvaal.

HIGH veld, high courage ! burghers of the east,
Great towering men, shaped on the windy heights :
Some full of years, veterans from fiercer fights,
Some in youth's hey-day, from the marriage-feast—
No more for you the lamp shall gleam a-nights ;
No more you'll greet the east when young day lights
The long Lebombo ; waking hours have ceased ;
For honour, word, and oath, your life is leased.
Wail not, then, mother, the lone sandy grave !
And you, young wife, weep not your man now dead !
Their blood has cleansed the ensign of the stain ;
Their grave enfolds clean honour ; 'neath the nave
Of heaven they lie in peace ; the life is sped,
But their bright memory shall long remain.

THE NEW PACE.

DAY follows hard on the heels of day in this young
land of the sun,

Night is a breath, light is a burst, ended ere well
begun ;

From Monday at morn to Saturday noon the out-
spans are few and far,

If the moon is down and the sun not up we trek
with the morning-star.

Not an eight-hour day but a six-day week is the
spell we reckon upon,

And the weeks run into a month before the unit of
pay is done ;

They say the seasons still number four, but August
is very nigh May,

And it seems but a step from Christmas eve to the
darkening shortest day.

The veld knows the purr of the cylinders and the
roar of the daily mail,

There isn't much chance of dozing now on an ant-
heap out in the vale ;
No longer the waggon meanders along all over the
broad brown track,
The hoot of the horn's in the van of the car and the
dust-cloud at her back.

No longer is the hooded cart with chestnuts abreast
the pole
The envy of the country side ; the iron is now in
the soul
As the dust in the eyes and the mouth of him who
needs must jump aside
At the call of a man at an auto wheel, and break his
pony's stride.

This morning I hulloed Hilary Jones with the bloom
of the north on his cheek,
He'd traversed twelve thousand miles of sea to eat
the homely leek ;
He'd trodden the plains of Canada and the Rockies'
western slopes,
And but yesterday I God-speeded him as he hung on
the gangway ropes.

44 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

The youth on his way to school to-day was sucking
a chubby fist

In a go-cart wheeled by a kaffir maid, when we met
in a morning mist ;

I shall see him next at the christening with his
first-born in his arms,

And it won't be long ere he's taking me out to show
me one of his farms.

Is it we who drive the days along and the weeks
and the months and the years,

Blotting out all the yesterdays, planting and plying
the shears ?

Do we make the pace up the morning rise and down
the afternoon fall,

With never an eye for the tired face or an ear for
the weary call ?

Or are we borne on the rising tide of a strong young
nation's sea

That will mount and swell and know no ebb till she
reaches maturity,

Will carve the narrows and fill the flats till she finds
her destiny's bound

On a far-flung shore where evermore the fall and the
flood shall sound ?

Whether human drive or tidal sweep is the key of
the mystery

To the eye of the nation yet unborn it may be given
to see ;

We only know that time for us is no smoothly-flowing
stream

Whereon the steersman may idly cruise and tack
and anchor and dream.

We know that the evening finds us far from the
morning's anchorage,

That through the long day we get no glimpse of the
steps of a landing-stage ;

That scarce has the bark slid down the slope of a
wave to an even keel,

When another is rising and poising aloft for the
shock that makes her reel.

A land for the young is this young land, for the eyes
that do not blink,

For the cheeks and the lips that do not blanch, for
the hearts that do not sink ;

46 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

A land for the feet that can tread the path through
donga and over kranz,
For the souls that can see the haven far o'er the sea
of circumstance.

The past forgotten, the future unknown, we joyfully
trim the sail,
Our hearts are light and we welcome the fight
although the bark be frail ;
We'd sooner be swamped by a rising tide than sink
in a stagnant pool,
And who can tell? at the end of a day we may
make a harbour cool.

THE HEART OF THE HILLS.

WHAT for a heart is ribbed within the hills,
The rugged monuments of time and storm ?
Fire, strength, and fervour, for it feeds and fills
Such majesty of frame, such towering form ;
No puny temper carries such a front,
Lightning- and hurricane-proof, and all unmoved
When thunders seal the riven firmament ;
'Gainst crash and blaze and buffet tried and proved.

Tenderness too ; or the reluctant mists
Had fled ere this to hidden halls of day,
And the frail snow that flutters where it lists
Had not found there a hostel until May.
On whose bare stones the tender mosses sleep
He is unruffled as the deeper seas ;
From whose dry nooks the elusive aloes peep,
His is the harbour of the soul that flees.

And fortitude ; for vainly torrents press
The battle home against his battlement :

48 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

The reinforcements under monsoon stress
Surge, fall, and flee his adamant intent.
Strong suns may beat and night-born frosts may bind,
But his brave heart remains invincible ;
The wheeling years renew their feet to find
Him scarred and seared but crowned and dominant
still.

Bounteous as God, of his own self he gives,
Earth of his earth, that the wide plains may bear
His opulence that plentifully lives
In unturned leagues, on lands loaned to the share.
On veld born of his gaunt and rutted flanks
He turns a flood of generating heat ;
He lures the rain-cloud that the waiting ranks
Of corn and vine may feel the life-blood beat.

Fidelity that standeth by her own,
And constancy that neither death nor life
Can shake : he keeps his silent watch alone.
The strong winds swiftly summoned to the strife
Bluster and pass ; the transient shadows flee ;
Morn, noon, and eve usurp the precedent place ;
He stays, the sentinel of eternity,
Flanking his vales : keeper of time and space.

And heart of grace ; or day-dawn would not seek
His hoary crests with such young bloom to dress,
Magnanimous the heart beneath the peak
Where morning lavishes her loveliness.
High-day would not heap on her focussed fires
Save in warm gratitude for his good will ;
Eve would not linger on his softened spires,
Did she not know the heart within the hill.

A heart to home to, else within his holds
Leopard and eagle would not bask and nest ;
Snows would not feed the fountains he enfolds,
The young copse would not so securely rest.
The hill-folk know the hospitable height,
And carol to his silence ; the reply
Rings from his tops through the pellucid light
To the still shadows where the homesteads lie.

NATURE AND ART.

“The damaske rose which is sweeter in the still than on the stalke.”

(John Lyly.)

TRANSLATION of the face of earth and sea
To canvas, written page, or sounding chord,
Leaves a vast long-accumulated hoard
Of wealth for every gem it takes ; and he,
Freed from his setting, changes wondrously,
Losing and gaining lustre with accord ;
For powerless are colour, note, and word
To catch the whole, to sum infinity.
The rainbow is beyond them and the stars,
And so they lavish all their tenderness
Upon the changeling ; spending on his dress
The last of all the treasure that is theirs ;
That's why I love my picture of a boat
On fancy's chartless seas proudly afloat.

A GREY DAY.

WEARY of colour and light,
Of gardens and streets ablaze,
It came in my soul's sore plight
Like Sunday among the days ;
Like violets among flowers,
Like a cave along a bay,
It came in the early hours,
That morning dressed in grey.

Dazed with distance and height
Of kranz and kopje and star,
My eyes were glad of respite
From straining to fix the far ;
But when the ceiling of grey
Shut out the arch of blue,
There wasn't a nook of the day
I didn't go peering into.

Hand in hand with the grey
There seemed to walk the still,

And the nearness of things to gainsay
Their silence seemed to thrill ;
Even at late high morn
On the garden there rested a hush :
I looked out over the lawn
Expecting to see a thrush.

The afternoon's slow march
Was tuned to the tone of a hymn,
I seemed to be in a church,
The light was so grey and dim ;
An avenue of gum
In long and slender file
Of pillars still and dumb
Flanked a cathedral aisle.

But when the night crept on
And grey grew into gloom,
The darkening cloud-bank dun
Oppressed like the wall of a room ;
I longed for a break of blue
And a great bright flooding wave
Of sunlight pouring through
Every nook of the dreary cave.

THE WALK.

Down the hill by a zig-zag path,
Rough and o'ergrown, the aftermath
Of heavy summer rains, we struck
The plain where the dogs had the great good luck
To find a wood to nose right through.
And while they followed spoor of sorts
Through every glade and bush, the forts
Of fur and feather trampling ;
I held the narrow light-brown ring
Of shadow, that the thin trees fling
When the sun's near the top of the arch of blue.

Reluctantly we left the cover
And stepped out into the flood together ;
The two dogs panting from the sport
Heightened the heat, the dachsi sought
The streak of shadow between my feet.
But when it seemed that we must melt,
A cooling wind stole over the veld ;

54 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

It tempered the sudden glaring shock,
The dogs their ears began to cock
At rustles about each bush and rock,
And ranged to find the still hare's seat.

A full hour now we forged ahead,
The broad veld track was sandy and red,
The grasses waved in a steady breeze,
A scraggy avenue of trees
Fenced the spreading plain for a while ;
Thence to the poort where spruyt and train
Meander through the low berg-chain,
The track dipped and the summer rains
Had left it flooded ; while I was at pains
To make a détour, there were canine gains :
A drink and a bath the way to beguile.

Beyond the poort we met a man ;
His face was tired, the sweat still ran,
The short grey sprouts on the deep-tan ground
Told sun-up labour : he had not found
The time to shave on a Sabbath morn.
A glad " Good day ! " and then the tale
Which, save by contrast, sounded stale :

While I'd been trying my rhymes to stitch,
Tuning thoughts and words to a pitch,
He'd been dragging a cow from a ditch,
Had saved her and a calf new-born.

Was it for want of a breeze we pined ?
(We'd turned for home and it followed behind)
Or was it the heat of the climbing day
That heightened the tedium of the way ?
The morning zest had diminished by half.
I could not banish the haunting fear
Which clung like the thought of a face austere,
That all the labour I might bring
To the making of songs I tried to sing,
Wouldn't equal at liberal reckoning
The worth of a cow and a new-born calf.

A PRAYER.

OH ! Thou Who in the morning years
Made the slow pulses throb,
Steeled us against the shivering fears,
Stifled the lust to rob,
Shaped us with keen-edged eastern winds,
Cooled us with winter snows,
Warmed us behind the close-drawn blinds,
Taught us how honour glows,
Thrilled us on wide-flung moor and fell,
Braced us in summer seas,
Stilled us in shadowed vale and dell,
Laid us 'neath spreading trees,
Drove us through rainy wind-swept streets,
Drenched us with icy showers,
Roused us from bitterest defeats,
Held us in panic hours,
Lengthened the grey of summer night,
Scented the new-mown hay,
Speeded the swallow's wheeling flight,
Tuned us love's roundelay ;

Be with us in these autumn days,
In this our southern home,
Steady our eyes to the searching rays,
Hand us when far we roam,
Give us a lead across the veld,
Bellow the slow camp fire,
Walk with us through the fever belt,
Quench the quick-rising ire,
Waken us at the rosy dawn,
Renew the tired eve,
Kindle the green on the crazy thorn,
Unmask the make-believe,
Stablish us facing the zigzag spear,
Temper the deaf'ning peal,
Steady the feet of the flying year,
Break humanity's seal,
Illumine the canopy overhead,
Darken the welcoming stoep,
Level the roughs of the paths we tread,
Carry the souls that droop.

REVERIE.

THE curtain of the night has veiled the sun,
The last thin line of green is now shut out ;
The last red shaft his upward way has won,
The wheel has taken one more turn about.

The day is gone : the dark holds heaven and earth,
Save where an invasive star is breaking through ;
Or where the street lamp lights up leisure's birth,
Signals the end of what we're called to do.

The spoken word is said, the ink is dry
That locks the written word with master key ;
In the archives of the day the records lie,
Naught can unsay, erase the history.

The iron's forged and hangs upon the nail,
The chips are chiselled from the rounded shaft ;
Well done or ill, nothing can now avail
To undo the done of eye and hand and craft.

Who would recall the word, the shaft, the shoe ?
 They stand the best of what we have to give ;
 To-morrow we will face the task anew,
 To-night we'll live as we may choose to live.

Shall music fill the spaces of the night :
 Chorus and song, and swelling symphony ?
 Or shall romance speed on the free hours' flight
 Till we have shared the hero's victory ?

Why search the shelves ? There's many a rousing
 song
 And circumstance in every plain man's tale ;
 Though on the scroll the dull drab details throng,
 The shining hour they never can assail.

We'll stroll from Westminster to Piccadilly
 And down the long broad highway to the Park ;
 The afternoon is fine and, willy-nilly,
 The crowd will bear us, as the waves a bark.

The jostle and the roar, the grave, the gay,
 We'll meet breast-wise the throbbing human tide ;
 And English faces, voices, by the way,
 Shall thrill our very souls with joy and pride.

60 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

The morning's early and the tide is high,
We'll take a header from the old quay wall,
And feel the rosy ripples lapping by,
As on the cool strong sea we rise and fall.

We'll take the track that winds across the moor,
The bracken will be wet but we're well shod ;
We'll send the rabbits lobbing down their spoor,
And hear the lark scaling the heights of God.

Over the brow there is a falling glen
Where, on a day, a thousand waters ran ;
The larch-glades cool are little sought of men,
And we may chance to hear the feet of Pan.

The village inn, the welcome open door,
The burly host, laconic, red, and hale,
The ham-hung ceiling and the cold stone floor—
We'll take the settle and a pint of ale.

The church upon the hill : it is so still
And restful in the fading evening light ;
The old folks sleep there peacefully until
The last trump calls them into God's own sight.

THE POINT OF VIEW.

A tree will hide a county,
A rock a vale ;
A word will block a bounty,
A wall a gale ;
Come out into the light, then,
And shun the shade ;
Let nothing shroud the sight when
The truth's displayed.

LE MIEUX EST L'ENNEMI DU BIEN.

Is anything the matter with the now
That we must still be straining to the next ?
The next will soon be now, and anyhow
There's mockery lurking in the fond pretext
Of a good time coming that will bring
Emancipation, a great enfranchising.

The chin may be too high for vision clear,
The happy valley's not beyond the hill,
A stretch of pleasant country here and near
Is awaiting a good husbandman to till :
See the seer in his cabbage patch,
His pipe's out ; he forgets to strike a match.

To run a tiring race and not know where
The tape is, not to see the winning-post,
To course around in circles like a hare,
And not know which is hunter, which is host,
Will leave you of a devil fast possessed,
And loose the hounds of envy and unrest.

Some men there are who cannot see the fair
For straining for a fairer yet to be,
Who cannot sit at ease and fill a chair
And make one of a jovial company :
Their eyes are roving sideways and beyond
Their lips are moving but do not respond.

A journey is a long addition sum,
A totting of the stations or the log ;
The wide majestic auditorium
A blank or at the best a dreary fog ;
And life itself becomes a terminus
That's never reached, the content but a curse.

The working day's an empty row of chimes
That slowly ring the dreary hours out ;
The working week's a series of six times
To turn the revolving calendar about ;
The playing hours an artificial chase
Of a phantom, and the only goal is pace.

The dinner is a prelude to the play,
Presided over by a waiting tram ;
The stall will have a feather in the way,
The next act has the song and epigram ;

64 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

“ We’d better leave before the curtain falls
And miss ‘ God save the king ! ’ and the recalls.”

The walk is but a Bradshaw underlined,
A bald coincidence of place and clock ;
The hurry there an empty striding grind,
The hurry back a cold shirt and a shock :
An item of the programme’s out of gear,
We should be there, and “ Curse it ! ” we are here.

’Twere better just to know bird calls to bird
To hear but not constrainedly to listen ;
To know but scarce to see that of the herd
A-browsing, fifty red-roan quarters glisten ;
To be content to be a sounding-board
And let nature have the choosing of the chord.

To know, not see, that butterflies still pass,
That still the industrious ants invade the ground ;
To feel, in spite of crickets in the grass,
The splendour of the silence all around ;
To spread out a relaxed and waiting soul,
And let nature have the filling of the scroll.

SIRIUS IN THE SOUTH.

LEST we forget, our mindful mother earth
Ever wheels on in silent axial sweep,
Discovering to her careless, wandering sons
A loved and long familiar tract of sky,
Wedded with youth and its unquenched fires.

From out his violet bed in the moonless night
Across the dark, washed clean by recent rains,
Bold Sirius darts his rays of green and red,
A diamond of restless brilliancy,
Out-dazzling all the host of lesser lights
That twinkle round him. King of the southern sky
He reigns in radiant splendour. Yet he lacks
The friendliness and soft solicitude
Wherewith he dominates the northern night
And vigilates a cradling summer sea.

THE CALL.

COME up with me unto the hills ;
They compass sanity : the ills
Of man world-old
Will find a balm in their blue length,
And weakness will awake to strength
Where they unfold.

Come out with me into the plains ;
Their green obliterates the stains
That mar the scroll ;
Their waving grasses and long leagues
Transmute the dreary dull intrigues
That choke the soul.

Come forth with me into the night,
And let its stillness speed the flight
Of restless care ;
The great peace of the firmament,
The steady restful stars, are sent
To solve despair.

Oh ! come into the shining day ;
Let the clean radiance now gainsay
Poor night-born schemes ;
Let the strong sun-shafts here beget
High courage, and the red sunset
Mother day-dreams.

Oh ! shed the husk of wall and roof,
Take cover in the sunlit kloof,
Arise and go
Where herd and goats nimbly ascend,
Where the long landscapes never end,
Where aloes blow.

AN EVENING WIND.

FOR hours the clouds have enveloped the sky
In a grey-blue funeral pall ;
Riding low and lowering high
They have threatened but failed to fall ;
Sulkily drifting off to the west
They have stifled the evening light ;
The wind now ranges his steeds abreast
To harry them in their flight.

He sweeps along at an easy pace
As though secure of his prey ;
The gums, forsooth ! must seek to brace
Their plumes to block his way ;
For a moment they venture to check his stride,
Claiming a victory
In a long low hiss, as they sweep aside
And nod in childish glee.

But now his coursers rear on high,
He calls them to the assault ;

Hoofs on the earth, manes in the sky,
They thunder across the vault.
The gums sway back from root to crown
And roar and creak and groan ;
His front afar, his wake dies down
To a long low deep-toned moan.

Again a hiss, a roar, and a moan !
His music marches free,
He seems to be seeking a lost key-tone,
The theme of a symphony.
The wild long chorus unrehearsed
Echoes now in fancy free
On a long shore where the rocks are nursed
On the breast of a swelling sea.

Now the song of the wind is the song of the wave
As it gently curls and breaks ;
The stones roll back in falling octave
Down the slope of the white spume-flakes ;
'Tis the song of the breaker mounting high
And falling with sullen roar :
The song that resounds to eternity
Along the lone seashore.

A WINTER AFTERNOON.

THE afternoon is bright ; the air is still and cold ;
The silence is the silence of South Africa
That ever seems at breaking point yet never breaks.
The shiver of the pendant leaves
That vainly seek to hide the blue gum's nakedness,
Is all that tells of life. The remorseless shade
Of living death and cold dead life
Creeps silent on the soul. When hark ! the mount-
ing song
Of man's last chanticleer, the throbbing car !
It rends the silence and the voice is Africa's,
Not alien, but the vibrant song of her young waking
life.

A SUMMER AFTERNOON.

THE leaden brooding sky of one short hour ago,
Inverted ridges and down-pointing promontories
Of grey and blue and black,
Has spent itself in sweeping hissing sheets of rain,
To the accompaniment of zig-zag flash and rocking
 peal,

While man and beast and all inanimate circumstance
Could only cower and wait.

And now the sunset sky is one long range of flame,
Lighting the western face of house and hill and
 tree

With a wild crimson aftermath of dying rage.
Suddenly to two gaunt battered boles of gum
The destiny is given to catch the ruddy glare
And soften it. They stand suffused,
Twin silent harbingers of quiet peaceful night.

So shall it surely be the lot
Of some rude derelict of war's ungovernable rage,

72 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

A grave of glorious dead, a broken trench of victory,
To herald in an hour of resurrected hope,
When the brute paradox of war shall lie behind
And peace shall lie before.

GREEN AND GOLD.

A WESTERN flood has filled the open alley
With the warm evening light ;
The dark green firs shut out the slumbering valley
And the grey kranz's height.

The wash of summer rains has soothed the grasses,
And every frond and leaf
Is radiant with a green that all surpasses
Description and belief.

A step it is into the glowing flood,
The yellow silent tide ;
And the green silence of the flanking wood
Another step aside.

A cricket and a single piping bird
Share the still scene with me ;
And yet their notes incessant have not stirred
The great tranquillity.

74 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

A presence holds this silent vestibule
Of living green and gold ;
The warm radiance and the coloured shadows cool
Vitality enfold :

Strong silent life, a tide without a wave,
Moving the memory :
Wedding the peace of a cathedral nave
To pulsings of the sea.

Is this the key : spark of coincidence
Of place and man and hour ?
The presence is the child of circumstance,
Of ray, and leaf, and shower ?

I do not know, and do not stop to ask,
It is enough for me
That beauty's self should here and now unmask,
Unfold infinity.

THE RANKER.

I HAVE no voice
To sing the song that rings through souls of men ;
Hymn thou the choice
That leads to life and hope and honour ; then
Hear my " Amen ! "

Direct my eyes
You that can pierce the smoke and scan the flame ;
Point me the skies
Of unveiled truth, burning and cloudless ; name
My goal the same.

Track the lone sands
You that are bold and strong to rein and steer ;
Cut the tight bands
That circle faltering feet that fear ; and hear
Our soul-born cheer.

Blaze us the trail
You that can pioneer through forests deep ;

76 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

We are not frail
In following, the trust we'll guard and keep
Till we shall sleep.

Sound the long peal
You that have heard fired freedom's clarion call ;
The rankers reel
For lack of unison, but captained, all
Will fight or fall.

THE SEA.

BANISHED the sea ! then heaven's fires light in vain
The day and night ; in vain magnificence
Of earth unfolds ; there is no solace, no,
Nor recompense. The changeless arch of blue
Roofs the long uplands, bounds the abyss of light
In unflecked majesty, but cannot stay
The throb for sea-born billows beating true.
The sea is nature's woman, the warm heart
That sends the glowing pulses through her sons.
Banished the sea ! then earth's a sepulchre.

Oh ! mother sea ! The sun has scaled the heights
That rim the east, his level morning beams
Search all the length of the yet sleeping vale
For fragmentary welcome : here a gum
Spreads his thin arms and speeds a wavering
smile ;
There a gaunt gable, hard and indolent,
Yawns drowsy greeting ; yonder waking cow
Blinks in reluctance at the opening day ;

78 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

But, for the rest, the long vale hugs the shade,
Turning its back upon effulgent dawn.
The miracle has gone, and left but light
Ere sleepy nature stirs. Oh ! for thy thrill
When every wave leaps up to meet the sun,
And throws it back transmuted to the morn,
A thousand rays at once, rosy with love :
Thy throbbing pulsing heart all animate.
The sleeper in the eastern room starts up,
Throws wide the casement, takes the wide suntrail
With 'trancéd eyes and parted trembling lips,
Then through the door, across the yielding sand,
Up the rock-face, on to the lapping marge :
One long deep breath, the poise before the spring,
And to thy heart he leaps through the green flood
That holds him, folds him, laves his cleaving limbs
Until they rest exulting on thy breast.

Oh ! mother sea ! The breezes cross the plains
On faltering feet ; they hesitate and halt,
Their march all spent upon the hot parched earth,
Or bluster heat-impregnated and scorch
What waits for cooling ; then they leap aloft
In wild and whirling vortices that sweep
Dead leaves and pillar'd dust up to the blue.

Canst thou not loose a swinging brine-steeped gale
So full, so strong, so resolute, so winged,
That all the thirsty interposéd leagues
Cannot exhaust it till it floods the cheek
And eyes and hair, and all around me sings
Of wave and cliff, of gull and albatross ?

Oh ! mother sea ! these curving contour waves,
Cold, petrified, and silent through all time,
Ridge after ridge caught and for ever held,
Their very crests curled over for the fall,
These troughed and tranquil vales—they call the
main

In flood of memory irresistible,
Yet but to banish it in mockery
The keener for their very steadfastness.
Oh ! for the waters' gay inconstancy,
The tireless swinging greybacks running free,
The breaking green, the lazy foamless tide,
The long-drawn growl when combers overwhelm the
rocks,

The purr of knee-deep spume called home again,
The rippling laughter up the rough-ribbed sand,
The gurgling chuckle 'long the low quay-wall,
The babble when the boat sleeps head to tide,

80 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

The long-resounding roar beneath the cliffs,
The moaning on the bar, the lullaby
That sings all through the dreamy summer night,
The matin challenge through the rosy dawn.

THE MOON'S TREK.

VEILING her face
With maiden grace
She leaves her lover, the sun ;
But shyly peeps
When from the deeps
Stars twinkle one by one.

Riding high
In the northern sky
In an anchorage of blue ;
On outstretched wing
When vespers ring,
To keep her lover in view.

Rising serene
In silver sheen
As he sinks red in the west ;
Queen of the night,
Speeding his flight
In her bridal splendour dressed.

82 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

Faint and pale
On the homeward trail,
Her course is nearly run ;
A last outspan
In the morning's van
And her long lone trek is done.

BEFORE THE STORM.

FROM six till six, from sun-up till sun-under,
We've kept the road, allowing for outspans,
With four good mules, as good as any man's,
And thirty miles the tale ! But can you wonder ?
All day we've been pursued by flash and thunder,
All day we've swallowed grit from dried-up pans ;
All day the following wind with fiery fans
Has raised the dust and made the leaders blunder.
We've been the fulcrum for the sun's long lever,
The focus for his hot straight-shafted rays ;
We've felt a thirst like that of raging fever
As up the glare of each long slope we've walked ;
Now the hot night in blotting out the blaze
Has loosed the storm that all day long has stalked.

WITHOUT AND WITHIN.

THE arresting splendour of the southern morning,
When from the shore of night,
The cool dark shadow of the deep stoep scorning,
We plunge into the light,
Holds us enthralled ; but brighter is the ray
Of hope that starts despairing manhood once more
 on his way.

The sensuous beauty of the southern plain,
When the young mantle green,
Responsive to the wash of tropic rain,
Puts on its summer sheen,
Is nature's masterpiece ; but fairer far
Is the fresh front of innocence without a stain to mar.

The lowering terror of the southern heaven,
When the brown avalanche
Before the fast-pursuing winds is driven,
And furrowed cheeks must blanch,

Is like a doom ; but doom itself is there
When judgment for a mean thing done is imminent
and bare.

The quiet peace that fills the southern night,
When from the sea of day,
Sunworn and weary of the long-fought fight,
We land where dark holds sway,
Is nature's benison ; but God's own gift
Is that great peace that comes when haunting fears
are cast adrift.

A WINDY MORNING.

CLEAN sunlit cold, hiss of the tree-tops swaying,
Wedding of sun and wind 'neath a green nave,
Strong forest seas, riot of green limbs playing,
Movement and melody, song of the wave.

Blue-shadowed hills, careless of wind and weather,
Still barriers, fronting the restless plain,
Long yellow leagues, rippling in light endeavour,
Green oases, calling for rest again.

Cloud-laden skies, white wind-borne fleeces sailing,
Piled on the horizon, shunning the higher blue,
A morning moon, faint in the light and paling,
A sheaf of golden sun-shafts breaking through.

FREEDOM.

WHEN you are rid of baggage packed to bursting :
Habit and mood and all the slough of self,
Grey hungry care and envy ever thirsting—
When they are with the lumber on the shelf ;

Then you will laugh to hear the young cock crowing,
Attuned you'll turn toward the bovine note ;
Piping from copse will set your pulses glowing,
You'll feel the quiver in the songster's throat.

When there's an end of wasted breath of wailing,
Of telling the long tally of your needs ;
When throes of doubt no longer are assailing,
And seeking crumbs of credit for your deeds ;

The yellow litter carpeting the wide road
Will mind you of the quickly-marching days,
Of branches freed the burden of a dead load,
Of twigs renewed of wind and autumn rays.

88 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

When no new crust heaps up the day's desiring,
When rage is banished from his dark abode ;
When vain regret is dead as vain aspiring,
When fear has fled and hate has lost his goad ;

The crazy scrub will call you to the grey kranz,
Grasses will beckon from the waiting kloof ;
Chrysanthemums will greet you with a shy glance,
And yet reluctantly remain aloof.

When your worn soul with shackles all encumbered,
No longer stalks ambition shod with spleen,
No longer pirouettes in rôles unnumbered,
Yourself spectator and yourself the scene :

.
Riding, hiding, through the cloud and out again,
The moon will swing serene across the vault ;
Stars will pale before the great orb's kind disdain,
While before her coming the planets halt.

Sighing, crying, gums will greet the evening breeze,
Plumes will sway in shy rhythmic delight ;
Shadows will chequer the broad highway between the
 trees,
Changing into fairyland the summer night.

Homing, roaming, loth to leave the lonely glade,
Murmuring the music of love's young dream,
Youth will wander across the light and through the
 shade,
Challenging the moonrays with love's soft gleam.

TWO VOICES.

THIS way, infinity and freedom wild,
The flung luxuriance of kranz and veld,
The long green stretches undulating far
And slowly climbing to the dim blue line—
A broad and stately sea of continent
Rising and falling as the slow winds will.
Here there is room enough for shadows blue
Vast as a county : now they pause, and now
Glide silently across the sunlit space ;
In the cool interval before they pass
A long-drawn deep intoxicating breath
Sets nature throbbing. Yonder browsing herd,
A hundred strong, is but a zig-zag line
Upon the further hillside. A slow train
With fleecy ensign, winding through the poort,
Creeps like a caterpillar o'er the veld,
Moving in silence till its whistle shrill
Rouses the loud remonstrance of the kloof.
This way immensity ; no rival eye

Sharing dominion of the vista vast,
Save where a vulture, poised on crescent wing,
Looks down from his pavilion in the blue.

This way the town, this way the walled-in streets
Encumbered with the rumbling squealing trams,
The undulating song of cylinders,
The crash and rush of motor-bicycles,
The creeping waggon and the trailing cab.
This way the iron roads, the open square
Glaring in focussed southern light, the air
Ablaze and resonant with discordant sounds.
But this way, too, the faces of the street :
The human freight of wheeling tram and car,
The jostle and tumultuous delight
Of good human propinquity ; the stream
Of men and women, maybe in the main
Hard and austere, care too predominant
And joy too rare ; yet it is warm and known,
And animate as we are animate.
The grasses and the plains, aloes and crags,
Are mute and irresponsible ; in their midst
In solitude more deep than of the sea.
Here we're at home, among our kith and kin.
Though the prevailing colour may be grey,

92 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

Now and anon the crown of womanhood,
Manhood in strength, the dignity of age,
And childhood's innocent and trusting eye,
Flash out and lo ! God walks once more with men.

SUNSET IN THE EAST.

BEFORE the eye of science the riddle solved itself ;
Did not indeed exist ; but to the wondering gaze
Of plain untrammelled man a miracle it seemed
That on the farthest limit of the eastern bound
A peak should stand rose-flushed, and owe its
wondrous light
To the sinking lord of the west : that o'er the arc
of eve,
Across the vast abyss of heaven, the far-flung rays
Should find a resting-place there in the shadowy
east,
And radiate the fast-accumulating gloom
With the last lingering beauty of the dying day.
The rose peak found his soul and told the glorious
tale
Of lone hearts flushed with unexpected joy ; of
nights
Made bright by penetrating rays whose origin
Is neither known nor sought.

A SUMMER MORNING.

HEAVEN high and far—
Oh ! the wide sweep of it
And the great deep of it—
Radiant with day's bright star.

A copse cradling here—
Oh ! the deep green of it
And the soft sheen of it—
Waving a word of good cheer.

A range resting there—
Oh ! the blue length of it
And the wild strength of it—
Asleep in the morning air.

A valley between—
Oh ! the great peace of it,
God has the lease of it—
Spreading its carpet of green.

A hawk in the sky—
Oh ! the glad sight of it
And the swift flight of it—
Sweeping and poising on high.

A hum all around—
Oh ! the low croon of it
And the full noon of it—
Housed in a silence profound.

A breeze from the north—
Oh ! the soft rush of it
And the warm blush of it—
Lazily seeking the south.

The sun on his way—
Oh ! the high arch of it
And the blue march of it—
Would he were willing to stay !

AD VALOREM.

No other test we ask, nor scale nor rod,
Than this : how we do stand in sight of God.
Stripped of all subterfuge and trick and dress,
We ask for judgment, neither more nor less,
According to our worth. If that be naught,
Cast us at once aside without a thought ;
But if we stand in credit on the gauge,
Give us our chance, give us man's heritage.

NORTHWARD—O !

So the morn you'll mount the gangway and hear
the shore-bell sound,
You'll feel the good ship gliding from the quay ;
You'll swing around the pier-head and the throbbing
screws will pound
Beneath the lazy pulsing of the sea.

You'll stand along the shore-rail and watch the
contours gleam
In the light of the slowly-westing sun ;
You'll hear the bluff of grey-backs, you'll see the
spume a-stream,
And " Northward—O ! " the voyage is begun !

Then the days will run together in a glad monotony
Filled out with running seas and clouded dome ;
You'll be cabined in the glory of a wild immensity,
And the snoring trades will speed the journey
home.

98 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

You'll swelter through the doldrums and sweat
 across the line,
You'll mark again the miracle of landfall ;
You'll anchor at the Islands and socially combine
To pay the usual hurried morning call.

You'll meet the P.O. liner abreast of Finisterre,
And pity the poor beggars outward-bound ;
Impatient at the short'ning log across the Bay
 you'll fare,
And wake to hear the Channel foghorns sound.

Oh ! the Channel and the Needles and the Water
 and the quay,
The run in the May morning up to town !
The quivering panorama of six thousand miles of
 sea
Now fades before the hedgerow and the down.

Now Capricorn is bartered for fifty north the line,
And the longitude is England's ! Oh ! the green,
The homesteads and the rivers, the horses and the
 kine,
The old, the loved, the choking English scene !

I can see you stepping down at dirty Waterloo,
Why ! the porter gruff of ten long years ago !
The bookstall and the faces : it is, it is all true !
You hardly dared believe and now you know.

When you've had your fill of London you'll hurtle
to the north
Or down the fat Thames valley to the west ;
Your eyes and heart will fill again on the spot that
gave you birth,
When lips and hands by your own folk are pressed.

Then the wistfulness of moorland, the freedom of
the fell,
The short turf on the cliff-head by the sea,
The shining sands of morning, the steady lazy
swell,
The salt spume when the boat is running free,

The purple of the heather, the yellow of the corn,
The tingle when the rain beats on the cheek,
The lark still singing skyward, the mavis on the
lawn,
The cawing when the rooks the elm-tops seek—

100 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

Oh ! I hear it all and see it all and envy you the
spell,

And you'll carry home the message from my heart ;
But I know there'll break a morning when you'll
wave a last farewell

As you're heading " Southward—O ! " abreast The
Start.

THE GAME.

OUT on the court, in the sun,
 In the keen strong afternoon light ;
 Work's account has been duly paid,
 Now there's only the game to be played,
 Maid and man against man and maid,
 Out there in coolest white :

The game's begun.

No one calls for a halt,
 Gleaming white in the sun,
 Back and fore the figures glide,
 The ball is driven from side to side,
 Out or in as the swaying tide
 Of the game runs gaily on ;

That's a fault !

Faster and yet more fast,
 Every stroke must now be tried :

102 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

Forward drive, long, swift, and low,
Lob to the line and back they go,
Volley quick, " Game all ! " and so
The game is fought for the side :
Set at last !

You who like the red on the brown
And the game eleven a side,
The cut past point to the off-side rails,
The break-back that just takes the bails,
The drive that over the pavilion sails,
The catch taken in the stride
Low down ;

You who like the white on the green
Sitting clear in the long fairway,
The two-twenty drive, low, clean, and true,
The cleek that takes you up in two,
The putt when the pill plumps out of view,
The honour that crowns the play—
All, I ween,

Will chorus the song I sing
Of a week rounded off with a ball ;

SONGS FROM THE SOUTH 103

Whether served from the line or driven from the
tee

Or bowled from the crease—it matters not a D

So long as the game's played cheerfully

By men and maidens all :

Hear the ping !

EVENING AND MORNING.

SOME sing the eve when the low western rays
Are all shut out from dark'ning northern streets,
And the encroaching shadows slowly mount
The eastern walls ; while in the gardens still
The dusk climbs up the silent patient trees
Until their tops alone remain aglow
As with an aureole. At even pace
Peace creeps upon the weary heart of man
And holds it rested ; the memory of the sun
Is but an afterglow of genial warmth,
Transmuted from the fires of dying day.
It is an hour serene, worthy a song,
Worthy, indeed, a full orchestral theme.

Yet how can eve compare with birth of morn
When the springing east, passing his barriers,
Floods the awaking vale with fresh strong light ?
For a brief while the shadows hold their ground,
Disputing earth's dominion with the sun,
Providing a last sanctuary for the dew.

SONGS FROM THE SOUTH 105

But shade and earth-born shower are soon o'er-
whelmed

Beneath the rising front of day's strong tide ;

And young and old, launched in its influence,

Mounting aloft on resolution's crest,

Ride gaily out on fortune's boundless sea.

So east means more than west, morn more than eve,

As flood more yet than ebb, light more than dark.

UP WIND AND SUN.

TREAD a wide glade, the sun upon the beam,
The wind behind,
And you will find
A tree a hard grey glare ;
The track a cut-out, rolled and bare ;
Through you fare,
Bereft the litter of a waking dream.

But face about and walk up wind and sun
And lo ! a scene
Verdant, serene,
Twin sun-steeped living flanks ;
Come, take your stand between the ranks,
Render your thanks,
And in this windy roofless nave breathe orison.

BY THE CAMP FIRE,

GIVE us a song !

This silence is the music of the dead ;

Ring it along !

We'll chorus it, the embers still burn red,

The stars will give the echo overhead.

Let it acclaim

The jingle of the ride into the sun ;

Full-throated blame

For falterers, praise full-lunged for the run

Onward and onward till the goal is won.

Give us a toast !

Nay, it is mine ! to Britain and her sons !

Her sea-worn coast,

Her ships that guard, her men that man the
guns,

To every drop of British blood that runs !

108 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

Brim one more glass !

Here ! let us see the colour in the light !

Each to his lass !

May the good God now keep her in his sight,

And cherish her throughout the coming night !

AWAKE !

NEVER a song
When the east you scan,
And soft mists throng
In the morning's van ?
There's room for a song under day's blue span !

Never a smile
When the blue wreaths curl
On the long hill pile,
When the clouds unfurl ?
There's a rosy fleece that's just a pearl !

Never a laugh
For the calling breeze ?
Can't you hear the sough
In the swaying trees ?
Why, the mealies are cackling at their ease !

Never a word
Of answering cheer,

110 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

When the waiting bird
Is calling near ?
There's a message the cricket would have you hear !

Never a spring
Up the kopje side ?
Look at the swing
Of the kaffir's stride ;
Won't you mount on the morning's rising tide ?

Never a sigh
To greet the shade ?
Measure the high
And arching glade ;
Your palace of green is ready-made !

Never a glance
At the bubbling pool ?
Born in the kranz
It is clear and cool ;
To pass it by is the way of a fool.

Never a nod
To the crescent moon,
To the gift of God

To late afternoon ?
The sun will be under the kopje soon.

Never an eye
For the fires of the west ?
The embers die
On the long berg-crest ;
They harbinger the dark and rest.

Never a prayer
To starry night ?
Consign your care
To the infinite ;
There's never a cloud to stay its flight !

EACH HIS TASK.

To him the laurel of the stricken field,
 He wings the heights, a third the deeps will yield
 Victory ; and glory be to God who steels
 Hearts that shall conquer, hands that hold the
 wheels.

Our privilege to do what they would ask :
 To prosecute unmoved the daily task,
 To tread the trodden paths, to feed the fires
 That still light up the hearth where faith aspires.

SOUTHWARD—O !

AR'NT you weary harrying pleasure ? The trees are
bare of leaves,

The woods are dead, and sodden to the heel ;

Ar'nt you weary of the dripping of the rain from off
the eaves ?

There was warning in the swallows' southern wheel.

The days are short, the streets are bleak, you huddle
by the fire,

Or watch the arc-lamp glimmering on the square ;

The morning has no lift in it, it's full of fog and
mire,

Sun-up is murky twilight, starshine's rare.

Buttoned to your buried chin you bend before the
blast : |

November sleet—and summer is begun !

Ah ! there it is ! the long-pent truth comes flooding
home at last :

You know that you are aching for the sun.

114 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

Aching for the southern sun, craving for the veld,
All through the encroaching night and yielding day ;
You see the far blue sky-line where kranz and kopje
melt,
You hear the silence calling : " Come away ! "

For you may damp the fire down through the months
and through the years,
Piling up a crust of lumber mined from ease ;
But when southern night is calling, when the shining
distance stirs,
No walls and streets will hold you, nor no seas.

.

Now London is a vision far astern the Union Mail,
Unless your girl's behind your glance is fore ;
The buffet through the Bay has blotted out the
northern trail,
To the south and to the sun your track you bore.

Somewhere off Gibraltar the bite will leave the gale,
You'll begin to square your shoulders to the full ;
You'll turn half-left to Africa and lean on the port-
rail
To watch the sun-trail dancing on the swell.

Madeira's gone, and whites are on, the chairs are in
the shade,

Cape Verde is three hours under, well abeam ;
The human tide swings deckwards and coteries are
made,

You're forgetting to remember or to dream.

You leave it to the engines when you've seen her
round the curve,

And the course is south-south-east down to the Bay ;
The long leg is before her and you know she will
not swerve ;

You're tuned down to the lazy roundelay.

Now and again at sunrise the majesty of morn,

And at sundown serenity of eve,

The cloven green tons for'ard, the far-spread fan
astern,

Reveal the real, blot out the make-believe,

The sun is well behind you, you have found the
Southern Cross,

You bend to southern trades beneath the bridge ;
The white-caps are assailing the unruffled albatross,
Contemptuously scaling each long ridge.

116 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

Table Mountain front of sunrise and in rear of Table
Bay,

Robben-Island and the quickly-tiering town

In the glare of Afric's dawning ! " Oh ! we have
come to stay "

The pier-head and the quay—the gangway's down !

AT THE END OF THE DAY.

WHERE will you have your chair
 At the end of a long-fought day :
 In a well-lit room with an open door,
 Your pipe alight, the rugs on the floor
 Held by the dogs, the fire a-roar,
 The piano inviting a lay ?
 Seldom there.

When the screws are pounding true
 At the end of a good day's run,
 Will you lean against the starboard rail,
 And follow the spread of the long moon-trail
 To where it ends in an opal pale,
 While the ship drives bravely on ?
 That'll do.

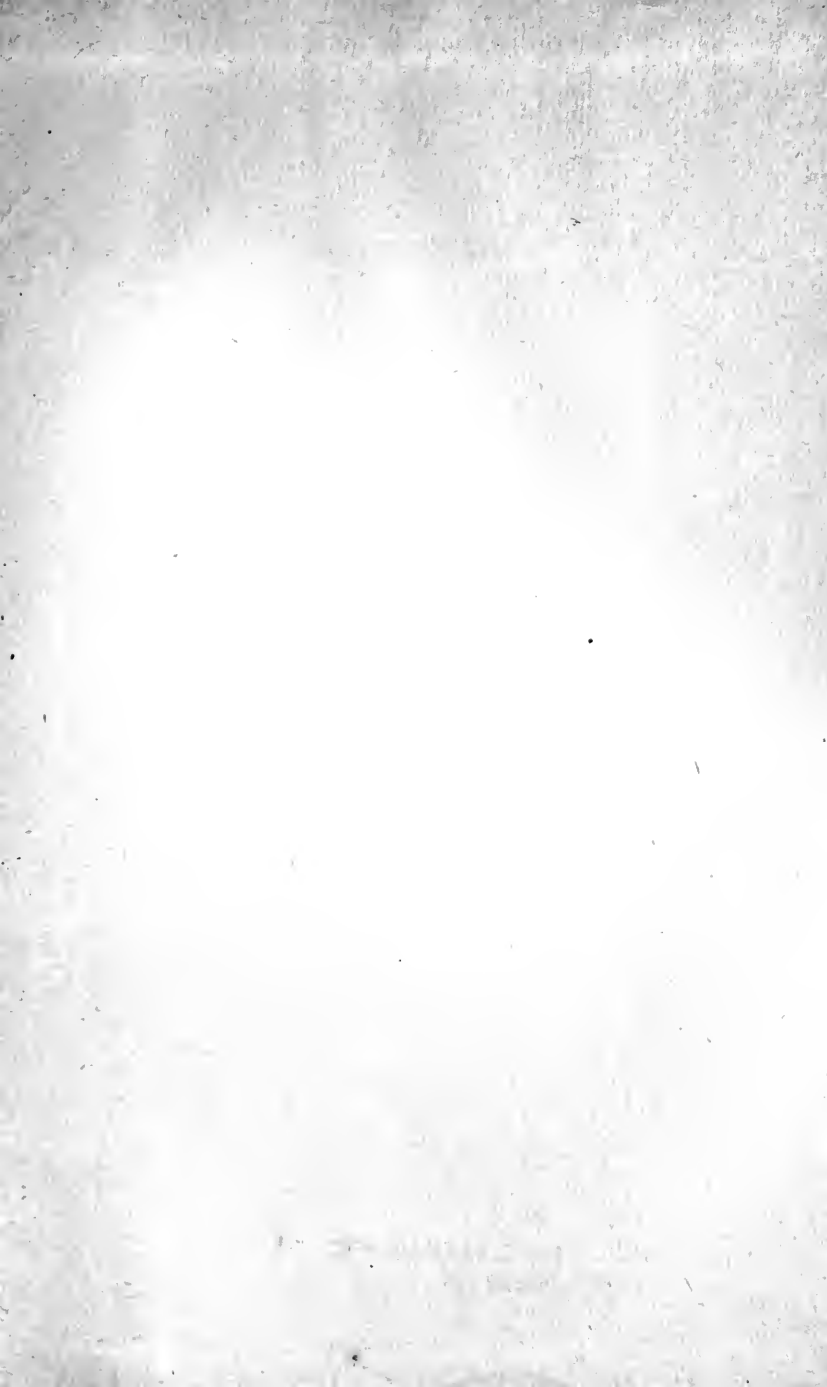
On the stoep is all not well
 With an outlook on to the night ?
 The moon's half up the eastern sky,

118 SONGS FROM THE SOUTH

The plumes of the gums are riding high
In a breeze that whispers a lullaby,
And never a cloud in sight—
For a spell.

On a lawn shall I set your chair ?
It runs straight down to the strand ;
The tide is high and a summer sea
Here on the rocks is breaking free,
There it is racing gleefully
Across the yellow sand—
Fix it there !





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